

Surfperches and Seaperches (Family Embiotocidae)

Annual commercial landings of surfperches have been highly variable. While the market for fresh "perch" fillets is relatively small, the total catch for the fishery was 49,000 pounds in 1999 (Leet et al. 2001). The Department did not distinguish between species in catch statistics until 1987, simply listing the category as surfperch. Currently, there is a large commercial fishery for various surfperches in southern California and a moderate fishery focusing on redbtail surfperch in northern California (Leet et al. 2001).

The sport fishery is enjoyed by anglers who fish for surfperch from piers, jetties, sandy beaches, and boats. The recreational catch of surfperch for 1999 totaled 489,000 fish, with the majority being caught in central and northern California (Leet et al. 2001). The average sport catch for 1993 through 1999 was 864,000 fish with a high of 1,119,000 fish in 1998 (Leet et al. 2001). Most of the California coastal species taken in the sport catch are taken when spawning aggregations are present. Female surfperches are intentionally targeted by sport anglers because they are larger than males (Leet et al. 2001). Sport anglers also grade their catch, which probably results in an even greater take of mature females, contributing to a decline in the fishery (Leet et al. 2001).

The redbtail and barred surfperches are the most notable in the commercial catch and may be important to local economies (Leet et al. 2001). Total commercial surfperch landings have fluctuated over the years, but over the long-term have declined by 25 percent since the 1950s (Leet et al. 2001). Recent research has indicated that some of the decline is associated with the increases in water temperature (Leet et al. 2001). Surfperch habitats have been, and will continue to be, areas of conflict. As humans develop the shoreline, areas inhabited by surfperches may become polluted or destroyed. Although surfperches may adapt to structures such as jetties and piers, it should not be assumed that they can continue to adapt to all the changes from human activities (Leet et al. 2001).

Barred Surfperch (*Amphistichus argenteus*)

Status of the Population:

During the last seven years, the sport fishery in southern California has yielded up to 306,000 barred surfperch (1998), while central and northern California together produced upwards of 252,000 fish annually. No estimates have been made of the size or current status of the barred surfperch population (Leet et al. 2001).

Home Range/Migratory Patterns:

Barred surfperch are found in small schools along sandy beaches and near jetties, piers, and other sources of food and cover. They range from Bodega Bay in northern California to north central Baja California.

Calico Surfperch (*Amphistichus koelzi*)

Status of the Population:

The mean sport catch from 1993 to 1999 was 16,000 fish. There is no targeted commercial catch, but small numbers are taken in the directed redbait surfperch fishery. At this time, little information is available on the population status of the calico surfperch (Leet et al. 2001).

Home Range/Migratory Patterns:

The range of the calico surfperch is from north central Washington to northern Baja California. The primary habitat of the calico is sandy beaches, although they can occasionally be found over rocky substrate. The vertical distribution of the calico includes depths from the surface down to 30 feet.

Pile Perch (*Damalichthys vacca*)

Status of the Population:

Pile perch sustain a limited commercial fishery in Del Mar, California but do not contribute substantially to annual commercial landings in the state. They are of interest as a sport fish throughout the state, with an average of 16,000 perch caught between 1993 and 1999 (Leet et al. 2001). Because accurate landings data for pile perch are lacking, little can be concluded about the current population status in California.

Home Range/Migratory Patterns:

Pile perch are found between southeastern Alaska and northern Baja California, including Guadalupe Island. They usually live along rocky shores, from the surface down to 150 feet.

Redtail Surfperch (*Amphistichus rhodoterus*)

Status of the Population:

The annual commercial take averaged 37,000 pounds over the last 10 years, with a high catch in 1990 in excess of 62,000 pounds and a low catch of around 27,000 pounds in 1998. There are no estimates of the size of the redbtail surfperch stocks in California coastal waters. The commercial catch averaged 50,000 pounds during the 1970s, 48,000 pounds during the 1980s and 38,000 pounds during the 1990s, which suggests a decreasing population. Another indicator of problems with the population is the decrease in weight from an average per fish weight of 1.8 pounds during the late 1950s and early 1960s to 0.9 pounds during the 1990s (Leet et al. 2001). The sport catch since 1993 has ranged from a low of 10,000 fish in 1998 to a high of 56,000 in 1994.

Home Range/Migratory Patterns:

Redtail surfperch are found from Vancouver Island, Canada, to Monterey Bay, California, but the fishery is centered north of the San Francisco Bay area. They support a commercial fishery only in northern California, especially in the inshore waters of the Eureka/Crescent City area where over 99 percent of the catch is taken. These fish are taken primarily from sandy beaches or the mouths of rivers and streams entering the sea, but also can be caught from jetties and piers inside harbors and bays. The best catches are in March and April when the fish aggregate for spawning.

Rubberlip Seaperch (*Rhacochilus toxotes*)

Status of the Population:

The sport catch over the last seven years ranged from 13,000 fish in 1993 to 44,000 fish in 1997 with an average of 19,000. The commercial fishery is very small with landings of less than 1,000 pounds annually from southern California (Leet et al. 2001). No recent estimates have been made of the rubberlip perch population and its status is unknown at this time.

Home Range/Migratory Patterns:

Rubberlip surfperch are found from Russian Gulch State Beach (Mendocino County), California, to central Baja California, including Guadalupe Island. These fish range from inshore waters to depths of 150 feet.

Striped Seaperch (*Embiotoca lateralis*)

Status of the Population:

Striped seaperch is one of the eight to ten species that make up the small commercial "perch" fishery. However, it is a minor component when compared to such species as the barred or redbtail surfperch. Conversely, striped seaperch do comprise a substantial portion of the state's sport fishery. The mean take of striped seaperch for the last seven years was 65,000 fish, almost entirely from central and northern California. Population estimates of striped seaperch have not been made, but recent landing figures indicate that this species should be able to sustain a healthy sport catch (Leet et al. 2001).

Home Range/Migratory Patterns:

Striped seaperch are found from southeastern Alaska to northern Baja California.

Walleye Surfperch (*Hyperprosopon argenteum*)

Status of the Population:

The commercial take is very minor with less than 6,000 pounds being landed since 1984. The recent sport take has averaged 112,000 fish per year. However, the total stock size is unknown at this time.

Home Range/Migratory Patterns:

Walleye surfperch are found in large schools along sandy beaches, jetties, kelp beds and other habitats with rich invertebrate life. They range from Vancouver Island, British Columbia, to central Baja California, including Guadalupe Island (Leet et al. 2001). They are found from the surface to a depth of 60 feet.

Surfperches

Current Regulations:

The recreational bag and possession limit is 5 surfperch in combination of species. There is a 10 ½ inch minimum size limit on the sport take of redbtail surfperch, and there is a closed season on the sport take of surfperch in San Francisco Bay and San Pablo Bay (bays) during the period April 1 through July 31, inclusive. However, during the closure in the bays, shiner surfperch may be taken and possessed under emergency regulations adopted during 2002 by the Commission. The Commission recently adopted the exemption to the closure in the bays for shiner surfperch on a permanent basis. Also, a requirement, that vessels entering the bays with surfperch aboard remain underway without fishing gear in the water until arriving at their home

port or launch site was repealed through regulations adopted in June 2002 by the Commission.

Surfperch may be taken commercially only between July 16 and April 30 (season is closed from May 1 through July 15), except shiner perch may be taken at any time. Surfperch may be sold or purchased only between July 16 and May 10. South of Point Arguello, Santa Barbara County, barred, redbill, and calico surfperch may not be taken; however, during the open season for these species north of Point Arguello, these surfperch species may be shipped south of Point Arguello and sold if fish are individually tagged by the permanent attachment of tags as directed by regulations adopted by the Commission. There is no size limit for surfperch taken commercially.

How MPAs May Help:

Surfperch fecundity (the number of offspring produced by an individual female) increases with age and size. If the average size increases in a reserve then the reproductive potential would be greater. As live-bearers surfperch in general produce very few young. For species where fecundity is known, large females produce between 2 and 6 times as many offspring than younger, smaller, ones. In MPAs it would be expected that more surfperch would be larger, thus significantly increasing the local reproductive output. This increase could lead to young surfperch replenishing nearby areas as they move out of the MPAs. Because some surfperch aggregate to spawn, MPAs in the appropriate locations could help protect spawning adults. This protection could provide for increased spawning success and thus more potential recruitment.